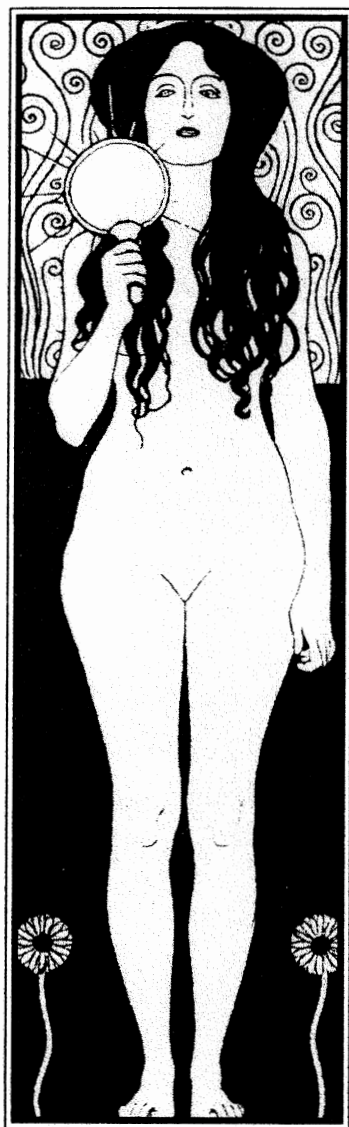
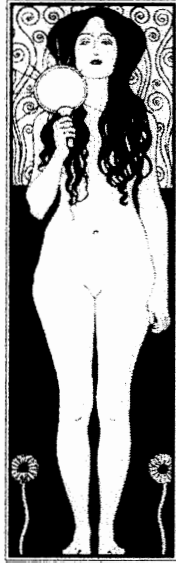


FOR LIFE



by Alexandra David-Néel

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translation by Vincent Félix

Introducing...Alexandra David-Néel!

At *Enemy Combatant Publications* we specialize in unearthing and showcasing obscure anarchist texts and in exploring territory neglected by the academic (university-based) and leftist branches of anarchist studies. In a sense, we're cultural archeologists and connoisseurs of all things forgotten, discarded or shunned by most "radical" historians, who try to bury any traces of rebellion *not in line* with the ideals of political correctness and societal perfection. Our interests are multifaceted and varied, and in our short publishing history we've become notorious both for our eclectic, oddball fare (which tends to occupy a mutable space between buried tradition and frenzied innovation) and our eschewing of the accepted boundaries of anarchist discourse (which seem to be, above all, committed to weeding out the unusual and anomalous and alleviating the "newly-enlisted" of mental obstacles standing in the way of blind obedience to leftist/activist doctrine). We place a premium on the revisiting of reviled ideas and overlooked anti-authoritarians from bygone eras that don't conform to the edicts of left-wing politics, partly to provoke a reevaluation of what anarchism *actually is* and also to offer a potentially richer vein of oppositional thought than the simplistic and overplayed revolutionary clichés of the anarchist Left—which have lost all power, except perhaps that to annoy (we also like to create pamphlets that reflect the sorts of things we'd enjoy discovering ourselves as readers).

Depressingly, anarchism in the United States hasn't been creatively renewing itself for decades (or really, since anarcho-communism gained ascendancy in the early 20th century) and the regurgitated tropes that pass for anarchist "theory" nowadays come across as pretty thin gruel to anyone who hasn't been dumbed down to a room-temperature IQ, lethargic corpse. Outside the leftist memory hole and the well-funded amnesia of the university system (and the *exclusionary* process that shapes so many accounts of anarchism), however, are remnants and references to a more colorful and less thoroughly governed anarchist tradition—an *alternate* history of party-line heresies, fluctuating styles of individual revolt, brilliant lost writings, and unforgettable mutineers whose vision of liberation was defiantly **their own**—and not some lame parroting of anarcho-communist platitudes; *this* anarchist history looks more like a bizarre carnival of egoistic expansion than a "movement" and demonstrates that anarchist history is always in a state of revision and rediscovery and is not only territory to be *fought over*, but a volatile storehouse of subversive narratives and evocative dreams open to multi-valent interpretations. We raid this storehouse periodically not in search of templates for action in the present world, but to tap into the *pure juice* at the heart of anarchism—not to faithfully "pay tribute" to our roots, but to gulp down Anarchy's distilled spirit, get bug-eyed drunk on it and let

its madness take possession! And our visits to this historical nether-realm occur with enough frequency that occasionally we hit pay dirt and succeed in releasing some particularly magical or remarkable piece of writing from its long-locked crypt (to us this is the philosophical or ideational equivalent of creating a virus, or letting a genie out of the bottle, or conjuring up demons—and just as fun!).

In this regard we draw massive inspiration from the Surrealists, who are always sending out rescue missions into the depths of History and coming back with awesome, wild characters everybody else forgot about ages ago. Lautremont is the classic example, but there are many more rebel forerunners who languished in obscurity until the French and Chicago surrealists started making a fuss about them—like the anarchist novelist Georges Darien and the utopian madman Charles Fourier.

The Surrealists resurrection of the amazing and unofficial past with its legions of eccentric and spirited non-conformists is, in our opinion, an essential task—and so for this particular pamphlet we decided to direct our own keen curatorial instincts towards a forgotten and undervalued anarchist whose story is just too exciting, too rich, and too out of the norm to resist: Alexandra David-Neel.

Historical Background

Individualist, anarchist, occultist and traveler, Alexandra David-Neel was born in Paris, on October 24th, 1868 and is certainly one of the most singular and iconoclastic figures in anarchist history. As a child her favorite books were the science fiction fantasies of Jules Verne, and, perhaps as a form of rebelliousness against her severe upbringing, she promised herself to one day outdo the heroes of these stories—and eventually made good on that promise, by living a life of such passion and adventure that it puts even the most epic novels and movies to shame. One of the first indications of this uncompromising sense of freedom and exploration was her running away from home at the age of five, just before her strict and repressive family left to move to Brussels. Only after a widespread search was she caught and marched to the police station by a gendarme, whom she bit and scratched during his attempts to apprehend her. Coupled with young Alexandra's desire for personal sovereignty was an intense interest in various "spiritual" practices (such as yoga and meditation) as techniques conducive to self-knowledge and individual emancipation—and a tenacious curiosity regarding the grand mysteries of the universe.

In her early twenties Alexandra studied Sanskrit at the Sorbonne in Paris and became a political radical, keeping a pistol and ammunition in her Paris room (unlike the vast majority of women of her day, Alexandra not only owned a gun, but later on when she had to use it, in Tibet, knew how). A heady aroma of revolution wafted in the air of Paris in the 1890's, where black more than red was still the color of rebellion, as though in mourning for the crushed Commune—and it was here that Alexandra met anarchist exiles from every industrial slum in Europe, as well as emaciated poets, painters and other merchants of dreams. Not surprising, considering her attitudes towards personal freedom, Alexandra grew into a committed anarchist and formed a close student/mentor relationship with Elise Reclus (1820-1905), the highly-respected French anarchist and geographer whom many now consider a precursor to the form of “green” anarchism known as social ecology.

During this period of time, Alexandra engaged in an extended anarchist literary outburst and the crème de la crème of her literary achievements is the lengthy essay *Pour la vie* (For Life) that she composed in 1892 as an “anarchist hymn to life”, and in which she disparaged the society of her day as being the “enforcer of constraint and death”. Many of the ideas that predisposed the essay *Pour la vie* (translated into English here for the first time) originated in Alexandra's study of two Chinese philosophers who flourished in the fourth century B.C.: Mo-Ti and Yang Chou, both of whom challenged the accepted bases of social order. Mo-Ti suggested that people be cooperative towards one another when possible out of *self-interest*, but that they ignore abstract ideals, since human beings hadn't the capacity to carry them out anyway. Yang-Chou was a real fire-breather who went much further and blasted **all** laws, particularly those that confined human instinct, regarding institutions and customs as impediments to happiness and castigating those cowards who went towards death like “chained animals never having lived”.

Another major influence on Alexandra's thought was the German individualist Max Stirner, whose book *The Ego and His Own* converted Alexandra from a libertarian in spirit to one in print and practice, and indeed, she was one of the first anarchists to point out parallels between Stirner and radically individualist Eastern thinkers like Yang-Chou. Stirner anticipated Nietzsche's assertion that “god is dead” and mocked the law-abiding citizen as “a dog dragging his chain”, celebrating the conscious egoist brave enough to heed their own desires. This resonated with the young Alexandra who held, like Stirner, that the individual must emancipate themselves first, and learn **rebellion** rather than revolution. David-Neel wrote a separate essay titled “The Theory of the Individual in Chinese Philosophy: Yang-Chou” in 1906, in which she elaborated on the connections she perceived between Stirner and Yang-Chou. This essay was recently translated by Vincent Stone and is available in the pamphlet *Neither Lord nor Subject: Anarchism and*

Eastern Thought (published by *Enemy Combatant*) and in the anthology ***Disruptive Elements: The Extremes of French Anarchism*** (published by *Ardent Press*).

When Alexandra finally finished the writing of her definitive statement on individualist anarchism, *Pour La Vie*, the essay featured a glowing preface by Elisée Reclus (which is also included in this edition). Publishers at the time were, however, too terrified to touch the book, though her friend Jean Haustont printed copies himself (four years after its completion) and it was eventually translated into five languages, including Russian.

Alexandra's dramatic anarchist musings made her well known to the police in Brussels and France, who retained dossiers on her which they passed on to British Intelligence nearly twenty years later. But Alexandra was not cut out to become a heroine of the Left—another Loiuse Michel—and was both too thoughtful and too self-absorbed to accept a role, even a leading one, in a mass movement.

Concurrent with her involvement in absinthe-drinking Parisian anarchist circles, Alexandra also pursued her studies in Buddhism, Vedanta and eastern philosophy, and at age 23, briefly joined an esoteric cult led by Sri Ananda Saraswati, who used hashish to obtain visions. Interestingly enough, Alexandra was actually *married* at this time to a wealthy womanizer named Phillip Neel, but found marriage so oppressive and insulting to her proto-feminist sensibilities that she composed this “letter of termination” to her devastated husband, before embarking to India in search of a new beginning:

Old Age is overtaking me quickly. Until marriage my eyes were wide open before me. I overflowed with plans. Suddenly all hope is dead and strangled in a kind of torpor which impedes rebellion. My gaze only looks back. My life is over and I feed on what I was.

By 1912 Alexandra had transformed her reality and was living in Calcutta, India where she took part in secretive Tantric rites, including on one occasion the ritual of the so-called “five forbidden substances”: meat, fish, pork, wine, and sexual union. She also made the acquaintance of the legendary con-artist Madame Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society, in India, but retained an anarchistic skepticism towards Blavatsky's theories, which she referred to as “spiritual fascism...elitist and hierarchical”. Religious thinking generally soothes the individual who is too weak to stand up single-handed against the eternal and intolerable mysteries, but Alexandra David-Neel's approach to it all was intriguing, as she combined a very rationalistic view of reality and human relations (especially as pertains to one's *ideals* in such matters) with a thoroughgoing egoism, which seemed to allow her to separate superstition from the observable *results* of the spiritual disciplines

she had such an undeniable interest in. For example, she took great pains to distance her path from more flashy occultists, yet also claimed to practice a type of astral or etheric travel (describing its mechanics and sensations in some detail), all the while admitting that her visions might be the product of autosuggestion. She also insisted throughout her life that Buddhism (of which she had many *rational* critiques) was relevant to and compatible with radical social thought.

Her two years in India studying yoga eventually convinced David-Neel that liberation was an entirely individual affair and she began to withdraw from anarchist milieus and plan a trip to Tibet, writing in her diary “I profoundly despise everything connected with politics and I avoid mixing in such matters. Don’t bother yourself except to accomplish well the mission assigned to you, without worrying about the missions of others.”

In the early years of the 20th century Tibet was still a mysterious region mostly sealed off from the outside world, and if westerners were an odd sight in Tibet, then western women were exceedingly rare. In order to gain entry to this remote kingdom, Alexandra decided to disguise herself as a male Tibetan pilgrim and to enter the country under this pretense. She travelled from Japan to China, into Mongolia, across the Gobi desert, and finally crept across the Tibetan border. The trip to the “forbidden city” of Lhasa took four months and in 1924, at the age of 56, she made it to the capital, exhausted and spent. Neel and her companion spent four months living in the capital, interacting and learning from the monks there, and it was here that she became the first European woman to meet and interview the 13th Dalai Lama, at the time in exile, who instructed her to “learn Tibetan” (this proved easy since she possessed an extraordinary facility for languages). She eventually wrote a bestselling book about her journey, entitled “My Journey To Lhasa”, in which she claimed that that along the way, she had made use of ‘tumo’ breathing, the esoteric Tibetan art of generating body heat to keep warm in freezing conditions. Her exposure to the extreme, hermit-like yogis of Tibet (who taught her *tumo breathing*) predisposed her even further to the renunciate’s life, as when she wrote: “I esteem unreservedly those yogis who have broken with all nursery games and who live alone with their audacious thoughts”.

David-Neel spent the next 14 years travelling the (then unmapped) length and breadth of Asia, before settling in Digne, France, where she built a retreat in which she could concentrate on penning memoirs of her adventures in Asia, and authoring numerous studies on Eastern philosophy and mysticism. Quite a wild character, but if there’s no place within anarchism for a certain freewheeling zaniness then how useful is it, really? And although David-Neel’s youthful commitment to anarchism stemmed from sources other than political dogmatism (most notably, an inherently freethinking personality) she never turned her back completely on it, and when in 1968, at age 100, insurrection

broke out in Paris and eventually across all of France, she spoke approvingly of it—only to die the following year at the impressive age of 101.

Comments on *Pour La Vie*

The acquisition, translating and editing of this essay rapidly grew out of all proportion, completely engulfing what remained of our spare time (not to mention our minds), yet there are still a few aspects of *Pour La Vie* that need to be addressed and clarified before we can consider this particular mission accomplished...

Pour La Vie is a gem of an essay, but there are several positions advocated towards the end of it that may be puzzling to modern readers—such as her faith in Science as a tool of liberation and her fantasies about technological advancement and “machines” doing away with physical drudgery, which David-Neel saw as “progress”. As with most matters, context helps to sort it all out: The idea that machines might be able to eventually eliminate unnecessary toil was not at all unique to Alexandra David-Neel, but was in fact shared by many of the leading anarchist lights of her time, including Oscar Wilde in his classic *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (which we also publish). It’s helpful to remember when encountering these positions that both Alexandra David-Neel and Oscar Wilde were primarily interested in removing distractions to *personal development* and *self-realization*, and could not have foreseen the world we now inhabit (which is by and large **shaped** by the techno-industrial system). Additionally, science was viewed by most anarchists then (like Elise Reclus, who had a strong influence on David-Neel) as an objective, neutral weapon in the battle against religious and metaphysical superstition, to be wielded alongside *rationality*.

Rationality was a lens David-Neel seemed to apply to everything she encountered in the phenomenal world and in fact, a consistent theme in her writings on Buddhism was her disapproval, even despair, of the veils of superstition that had been added to the “pure” doctrine during ensuing centuries. She herself accepted nothing on faith, but was determined, in the original Buddhist tradition, to explore, examine and test the teaching for herself and by means of this “rational Buddhism” she arrived at conclusions, ironically, quite similar to those of her early philosophical influence, Max Stirner: *that the so-called self, to which we all cling, was not solid or imperishable but constantly in flux*. To inspect this convergence of European and Eastern perspectives more closely, one would benefit from reading both her *A Parisian’s Trip to Lhasa*, her libertarian writings, as well as the novel of her close friend, lama yongden, *The Power of Nothingness*. In this combination, one finds a rich and brilliant approach to religious tradition, individualism, and reality itself—certainly worth pursuing for any anarchist wishing to break patterned cultural norms (particularly the *anti-norms*).

Despite these caveats, this edition of *For Life* is one of our proudest achievements as a publishing project and we encourage you to get comfortable and enjoy the ride. And while you're doing that we promise to continue excavating some top-drawer anarchist rarities and arcana for your future reading pleasure....

—Cedric Rainwater, contemplating the void

Preface

from the first edition of “*Pour la Vie*”

This is a noble book, written by an even nobler woman. So *For Life* needs no preface; my words here are completely superfluous. I offer them nevertheless since I was asked to, but only do so as a friend and in order to sing a few quiet notes in unison with the beautiful voice that harmoniously surprises us with this *Hymn to Life*.

“Man, where will you go?”

“Beneath the sky!”

“Where will you live?”

“On the earth!”

“Who will guide you?”

“Myself!”

Such is the theme in its audacious simplicity! It’s good, and I too am happy to sing to life, this life that will be so good... when all have bread and freedom.

In the meantime, let us not forget that we can never conquer this bread and freedom for ourselves so long as we are cowards, not even daring to think our own thoughts or live our own lives, so long as we complicate our ethics with prejudices, false respects and false duties, so long as we avoid acting bravely and in a beautiful harmony with our true nature.

When we hear the story of hindu widows who have taken on the pious obligation to climb onto their husband’s funeral pyre, we express a naïve surprise as if we weren’t ourselves such demented beings as to offer ourselves as willing victims, to kill ourselves – not in accordance with a work of beauty, but in accordance with silliness, vanities, or lies. What is left of our existence after all the hours that we have feigned a way of thinking and a morality that are in no way our own? We are habituated to wearing the mask, so well that it appears strange to us to let our true form be seen, to proclaim in a frank and personal voice that which we know to be the truth. Out of spinelessness, we don’t even have the chance to be good when we want to be. It seems more “distinguished” to be banal, neutral, mediocre, to soften ourselves to the recipes of domestic virtue and good taste, as they profess at the Académie!

But the time will come when the victory song of our friend will be heard, when we will understand the clear voice calling us to live our true lives sincerely, joyfully; and we will repeat with her:

Man’s purpose is to be himself;

The purpose of his life is to not be dead while appearing to be alive.

-Elisée RECLUS

*Ignorance covers science,
This is how beings err.
-Bhagavad-Gita*

Pour La Vie

As soon as a being has formed, all of its forces strive to a single goal: to maintain its own existence in feeding itself and defending itself against any influence capable of destroying or weakening it.

All beings in nature strive toward life, all seek, according to their faculties, the joy given by satisfied need; all avoid suffering, the deprivation which is a restrictions, reductions of life.

In the period of early childhood, prior to becoming conscious, or rather not yet having had his normal conscience deformed and falsified, man follows this universal tendency like all other beings. Later, ceding to the suggestions of example and the false notions that are taught to him, he ends up curbing his own nature, taming the impulses of his personality, and letting the influences attacking his own life work on him without fighting them; but how many revolts have preceded this renouncement! You would have to never have seen a child growing up to be ignorant of what struggles the natural sentiment of self-preservation and the satisfaction of instincts arouse between the child and the educators devoted to training him.

So prevailed has the doctrine of the fall of man, considered as torn from his primitive perfection and fallen into a state of moral infirmity which only the light of divine revelation prescribing a rule of conduct opposed to the demands of his being can remedy; so much that, dominated by the prejudice of the separation of mind and body, they believed – in the expression of christian texts – that the duty to “hate one’s own flesh,” to glorify death in martyrizing the body and giving predominance to suffering over enjoyment was the logical consequence of this religious conception in which they had faith.

The study of nature has made a tabula rasa of all these old legends. Man is no longer this fallen one obligated to incessantly stifle the voice of his perverted instinct. No more than any other beings existing in the universe, he hasn’t any reason to detest or despise his body or the thought from which it emanates. Science shows us nowhere laws existing outside of the properties inherent to matter and implying the adherence of man to a rule for which he finds no sanction in himself, in the needs of his body.

We cannot say it enough: the unique law of beings, demonstrated and confirmed by study and experiment, is the desire for life, the pursuit of satisfaction of all the faculties, the means to live fully, and the struggle against any form of suffering.

Man has no reason to believe himself outside of this universal law. The most perfected of known beings, he feels in his own depths, like the humblest of his brothers in existence, an ardent and imperious desire to live intensely, without weakening, without restriction. An unbelievable perversion of his judgement alone has been able to make him accept, to the present, to live weakly, sickly, bowed under constraint, accepting pain without revolt.

May he today put himself right in the name of this sentiment, despised over centuries of ignorance: in the name of this instinct disdainfully abandoned to animals, while man, drawing vanity from his soul or immaterial spirit, proves nothing but his madness.

May each follow entirely, everywhere, and always the impulse of his nature, narrow-minded or ingenious, whatever the case may be. Then, and only then, will man know what it is to be alive, in place of despising life without ever having truly lived.

On Authority

Obedience is death. Every instant in which man submits to an outside will is an instant taken from his life.

When an individual is constrained to carry out an act contrary to his desire or prevented from acting in accordance with his need, he ceases living his own life and, while he who commands expands his power of life from the strength belonging to those who submit to him, he who obeys destroys himself, is absorbed into an outside personality; he is no longer but a mechanical force, a tool in the service of a master.

Whether it is a matter of authority exercised by a man over other men, by a despotic monarch over his subjects, by a boss over his workers, by a master over his servants, we understand immediately that this personality employs the lives of those who are obedient to the satisfaction of his pleasures, his needs, or his interests: which is to say to the embellishment, to the extension of his own life at the expense of theirs. What is generally less well understood is the harmful influence of authorities in the abstract sense: ideas, religious or other forms of myths, customs, etc. All exterior manifestations of authority however, have their source in a mental authority. No material authority, whether that of laws or that of individuals, presently has any strength or reason in itself. Not a single one actually exerts itself, they are all based on

ideas. And it is because from the start man submits to these ideas that he comes to accept their tangible realization in various forms clothed in the principle of authority.

Obedience has two distinct phases:

- 1 – One obeys because he cannot do otherwise;
- 2 – One obeys because he believes he has to obey.

In the almost animal state of life in which the first humans lived, the strongest will is the supreme law to which the weakest have to submit. “I want” says he who feels vigorous enough to constrain another to obey. This constraint implied no moral sanction. The one wants because such is his wish, the other obeys out of fear of violence. If he can evade reprisal, he who obeys out of fear hastens to act as he pleases, quite content with his freedom – and ready, in his turn, to impose his will on he who he finds to be weaker than himself. This domination by physical force cannot be, in truth, called *authority*: it is but a passing and uniquely material constraint, not accepted by the will of he who obeys. Only domination exercised in the name of abstract ideas on the weaker by the stronger and accepted by the former constitutes authority. We then enter the second phase: One obeys because he thinks that it is necessary to obey.

When the conditions of their environment permit men to begin reflecting, a few among them whose mentality is more developed show the desire to make the others obey them, either out of purely selfish interest, or, most often, from having formed an ideal of life that appears to suit their group that they wish to see realized.

But, without science – which proves and demonstrates – and guided by vague experiences, a few superficial observations and above all their own imagination, how can they subject the masses around them – masses of which they cannot become masters by physical force?

This is when their innovative mind takes advantage of ignorance, the terror of uneasy men within an incomprehensible and terrifying nature. The gods are given the task of bringing man their rules of conduct.

The fear inspired by the unknown in crude minds extends in this manner to those who speak in its name: to those who explain the law and demand its observation in the name of the gods.

Here is the first authority: founded by ruse and based on chimera. Man accepts it out of ignorance as he will accept out of ignorance all of those born in its wake.

By these mysterious laws, presented as the expression of an extra-terrestrial will, the religious leaders will command man, no longer telling him "*I want*," which is addressed to the body and from which he can attempt to evade, but in telling him "*you shall*." Escape is no longer possible now for living freely and outside of the presence of the boss who has become formidable in strength. From now on man has in himself an invisible constraint: the will of god, which he carries like a burden. Coming or going, in all places, in all times, his memory repeats to him what he must do or avoid. They have taught him how to discern good and evil.

In all times, man, like all beings, has distinguished the things that give him satisfaction and those that produce suffering. This natural good and evil, no one needs to teach it to him, but, relying on the will expressed by god, an incomprehensible and unquestionable will, he is forced to accept passive resignation, blind submission, pain, and renouncement of the most natural yearnings as expressions of good: evil, in short, in all its forms. The official evil, that was life itself with all its desires and all its joys, its need for freedom, its curiosity of things, its noble revolts, its loathing of suffering, all that is *beautiful and true*.

The first codes, written or not, were very different depending on the environments and the races from which they arose and underwent numerous modifications following the evolution of societies. But whatever may be the laws and social powers before which men kneel, it is certain that their strength is subordinate to the acceptance of a moral code.

The man who, by a perversion of his natural senses, believes in noble suffering, in the unpleasant good and evil, the source of pleasures, alone understands the necessity of an organization destined to impose the good by force and to repress with violence any who would try to abandon themselves to evil for satisfaction.

In the current struggle produced by the antagonism between true interest and the rule of conduct to which *he believes* he has to conform, man habituates himself to constraint and finds himself ready to accept it when it comes from an outside authority. Doubtless he will put up a fight, argue; good and evil differ from individual to individual as from one people to another; the one will be proud of what the other condemns, but the principle remains unchanging at base. If one wants to overturn the morality of his neighbor and the authoritarian apparatus with which he enforces it, it's to replace his own morality which, like all the others, will need to be imposed by force upon those who will not stand for it. As there are always many common points among people of the same race, they generally prefer to sacrifice something of its conception of the good and to conserve the guardians of the code of their adversaries, provided they avoid the common enemy; the truly free man acting according to his need while submitting to nobody.

Had the less ignorant man held onto the distinction that he feels deeply in himself: the useful *good*, the harmful *evil*, he would have little by little progressed while seeking the best means for avoiding suffering and satisfying his material and intellectual needs. There would have been hygienists, inventors, savants of all disciplines. His credulity has made him bow before self-described wills of chimeric beings: there has been priests, kings, warriors, politicians; he has suffered, cried, he has martyred his flesh to save his soul and sacrificed his existence to supposed social duties.

In our modern societies, authority no longer officially relies upon a divinity. We still talk about it much in terms of good and evil, but in fact the observation of so-called moral laws (since we no longer call them divine) is not obligatory. We have only retained the good that the legislators judge to be useful and profitable to the current social order. Virtue is still commended in the great speeches, but vice is quite welcome.

They no longer ask you to save your soul, it's enough for you to be an *honest man*, meaning, act in accord with the will of the legislators in life's outward acts.

As limited as this conception may be, it is enough to have taken plenty of victims: honor, patriotism, and other secular virtues have killed as many people as the gods of the past. It will go on this way so long as man seeks his rule of conduct outside of science, alone capable of giving him a clear view of his own interests: the only authority that he needs to know.

The first legislators, in imposing their codes in the name of gods, would not have needed to provide evidence for their morality. Men habituated to obey force would submit this time, too, out of fear of a force greater than themselves. In ceasing to believe in gods, man, delivered from his terrors, should logically cease obeying everything that is out of harmony with his interest. This is far from the case.

An inherited logic has created a tendency in us to repeat the behaviors of those who came before us; our physical build, in recalling that of our fathers, predisposes us to act, to think like them. These predispositions become greater still with the influence of an education steered in this same direction. There would be nothing remarkable about this if the ignorance of man hadn't transformed this simple habit in one particular sense: the *conscience*, the organ for which no anatomist has found with his scalpel.

For believers, the conscience is the voice of god speaking within us. For the others, because non-believers too talk about their conscience, what could it be, if not the result of dispositions that are particular to each organism and a function of memory?

The gods could disappear, humanity has replaced them; for its own servitude, it has invented the secular god, internal tyranny: the conscience.

And yet, under the violent incantations of instinct, man recalls the irresistible penchant for the good, for joy, and then, in spite of the obstacles, he lives for a moment in the act of his choice. For a minute, he tastes life, but that's when all the defenses they've made for him come back to his memory. Unaccustomed to living freely, he is filled with terror finding himself alone outside of the boundaries within which he is so used to walking. This memory of *rules* that he's been taught, this discomfort from having acted differently from his habits, all of this trouble seems to him the reproach of his indignant conscience. Nothing unfortunate has come of it and yet his joy is spoiled.

An artificial sentiment: *remorse*, makes him suffer without cause. He accuses himself for his own act, names it a fault, a sin, an *evil deed*.

And why is this action *evil*? If it has caused harm, or suffering, it is understandable that the man would regret it; this regret would be the point of departure for an experience teaching him not to hurt himself in such circumstances again. But if the action has been useful to his life, if it has procured him strength or contentment, is it not rather a *good deed*?

Every conception of the imagination seeks to become real in a physical form. Thoughts engender action, philosophical systems – social organizations. The internal tribunal, the conscience, gives birth to judicial authority, to the judge; remorse and voluntary atonement make coercion accepted.

If man were not accustomed to scrutinizing his acts, to weighing them on a scale other than his own real interest; if he were not blamed and declared guilty many times, how could he allow another man asking him to explain his actions, or setting himself up as a moralist of his actions to absolve or punish them?

The belief in guilt is the basis of this whole system. Man believes himself guilty, he believes that other men find themselves guilty, and from there, he concludes the necessity of repressive power.

As for determining which deeds are reprehensible, things are not so easy. As everyone conceives of good and evil in a different manner, the famous *Voice of Conscience* speaks differently according to each individual. This cacophony would be just the thing to make men realize the mistake, if only they leant their attention to it; but the majority believes in *abstract*, immutable justice, of which the conscience is an echo. In the name of this justice it demands the sanction of good and evil from judicial power. This conception of justice arrays

itself too, in the details, a point of view particular to each individual and each one, naturally finding only his own opinion true, and qualifies everything that falls outside of it injustice.

Such a confusion should show men the inanity of everything that is not based on experience; yet this is not enough to dissipate their blindness, they continue to demand justice like they demand a direction and time and again get nothing out of it but constraint.

What is the sentence rendered by a magistrate, in the name of the law? It is the constraint exercised on an individual to force him to conform or to punish him for having infringed the will of a few hundred parliamentarians whose function is to legislate. Were these men to change their minds tomorrow or were they to cede their places to others, then these new ones could make different laws and the judge, pronouncing other sentences, would proclaim another justice. When a jury is called to give a verdict on the deed of the charged, does one not see also that personal ideas, character, momentary physical dispositions of the jurists are the only bases on which the judgement is made? Change the jurists, and the individual acquitted by some would be declared worthy of capital punishment by others.

If good and evil, justice and injustice are not immutable, eternally similar; if these ideas, like others, are subject to variations arising from men and environments, by what right can one blame the particular conception that an individual makes of them? His perception is perhaps that of yesterday, perhaps also that of tomorrow, and in no case can you convince him that he is transgressing the law of the good or that of justice, since from the moment that a single modification is made to these ideas by the acts of men, you must admit all those that other individuals will eventually subject him to.

At the most you might say that the personal notion of this individual will not come into harmony with the majority of those around him. But if, for thinking differently from the masses, someone strikes him, would this prove that he is wrong or right? Neither, this will only demonstrate, once again, that authority can only produce constraint and death, that it is powerless to elucidate and to support life.

Next to official authority, basing its power directly on abstract ideas, there exists another authority, even more powerful, although not officially recognized: the one which relies on material possession.

He who has many advantages at his disposal will easily obtain the obedience of other men to gain in return some part of his advantages of which they are, more or less, deprived.

The enormous disproportion between the vast array of material possessions of some and the absolute destitution of others has even produced a very large class of individuals who not only sell *a part* of their lives, but hand over their entire life in exchange for sustenance that is barely sufficient to allow the body to live for the sake of another.

Official authority reserves its punishments for a certain number of acts outside of which there is still place for a little bit of life, but this half-freedom exists only for he who owns. The man who owns nothing or too little is obliged to acquire what he lacks with the aid of the only merchandise he can traffic: his body. For him, the horizon, already so restrained, closes in even more yet and, ceasing to be a man, he falls to the rank of domestic animal.

In reflecting a little, we see however that the power conferred by possession of riches is but indirectly based on material objects and that its true source resides in arbitrary ideas as well, in chimera that a profound ignorance alone can bring to acceptance.

In fact, if we leave this domain of prejudices to enter into that of truth, meaning science, what is the scientific demonstration through which we will prove that a thing belongs to one individual as opposed to another?

Will it be because he received this thing from one of his ancestors? You would have to begin by proving that that which he had left to him really and truly belonged to this ancestor and that said ancestor could dispose of it as he wished. When I say “could” I understand by this that it was *naturally* possible, by himself, and not by the consent and with the aid of those around him, since have they not given their acceptance to this transmission only because they *believed* in the legitimacy of the particular possession?

Would that be because he had purchased this object?

And with what did he purchase it, if not by in exchanging it with another thing he possessed before? If I have exchanged some metal discs for a house, it does not follow, scientifically, that this house belong to me; it remains to be proven at the very least that these discs of metal belonged to me in some way other than the tacit consent of those around me.

Would that be because he worked and in return they gave him some things?

That is not an explanation, for this method of explanation is based precisely on *belief* in the legitimacy of the possession of those with whom the exchange of work is practiced in this way.

Would it be because he *had made* an object that it belonged to him?

This object, did he make it alone? Did he alone make the raw materials that aided in his making? No, without a doubt. Without the help of masses of men, the slightest thing would not exist. Bread is not simply the work of the baker who kneaded it, but that of the miller who milled the grain, that of those who threshed the grain, those who put it in sheaves, put it into the granary, those who planted the seed, worked the fields, etc. All of these activities are brought together in the smallest morsel of bread. The smallest piece of metal is not only the work of those who fashioned it but of those who, beginning with the extraction of the minerals, have cooperated in the multiple metallurgical operations and then also those that furnished the machines necessary for all of these operations. And so it's an endless chain, a circle that encompasses all of humanity, rendering each one necessary to the benefits of all, without it being possible, however, to evaluate precisely the share of cooperation brought by each individual.

He alone who has *made* it without any outside support can without a doubt be called the master of his work. But this notion is chimeric. We scoff at the hypothesis of a *creator god*, meaning a god creating something out of nothing, whereas when it's a matter of men they'll go off repeating phrases like these: "He is the author of that... He only owes himself for that, etc." *E nihilo nihil*¹ (nothing comes out of nothing), each thing having its source in another thing, such is the law.

Our body is a product of those of our parents, fed by the daily assimilation of a whole host of elements taken from nature; our thoughts are born out of and fed by the thoughts of others; our whole mental and physical organism, in constant communion with the *all*, has no point where it might rest on and say *me*, because everywhere he finds others in him; and we mean *mine*, to assert the possession over material objects, or of a being that doesn't belong to itself.

Possession in the legal sense rests solely on the acceptance of a fact whose origins no one seeks out, when they are too distant. This is what is called *established right*. In reality, it is the approval given to the act of personal

1. Translator's note – David-Néel probably means *ex nihilo nihil fit*.

appropriation once it has succeeded, and remained; on condition, of course, that this first appropriation, which necessarily still has to keep itself at the expense of others, dates back to a distant epoch sufficiently at a distance. When, on the contrary, the appropriation is quite recent, when it is made only by the strength of a single individual, it is called theft and its author is sent to prison. However, this act, considered reprehensible, ceases to bring on punishment if its author has the ability to dissimulate himself for a certain number of years. The statute of limitations is the prize for his cleverness. It is considered, probably, that such a long possession is a title; and the lucky winner in this struggle is free to leave his property to his descendents who, along with him, have *established their rights*. And this is how they have entered the game, in the same way the descendants of these feudal barons whose fortune draws its origins on the spoils of voyagers as their earlier ancestors kindly robbed under the legal protection of their burgs and manors.

Many minds seeking reforms have proposed that possession applies to that which one can conquer and that which one can defend.

It seems to me here, once again, that an individual can acquire nothing without a whole host of aids. If his strength is up to it, has he not benefited from the cooperation of those who have made the instruments, the tools which he has used, to all those who aided him in maintaining his life during the work, in furnishing him food, clothing, a place to live, fire, light, etc. And in order to enjoy what it is he has conquered, to maintain it, the same cooperation is necessary. Man is not only a tributary of his contemporaries, but of his forefathers whose experience, whose discoveries, are so many points of support for him. In reality, it's from all the toil, all humanity's thought, accumulated for centuries upon centuries, which we benefit when we enjoy the slightest of objects useful to our lives.

What constitutes the right to property of a thing, some others will say, is the need that one has of this thing. Very well. But needs are multiple and passing; possession, in this case, should cease with the need and be born with it. This is but a simple using of things.

Life and experience are made precisely from the diversity of things which one has experienced and of which one has made use; while continuous possession of the same things produces but immobility and thoughtlessness.

Product of all, all is at the service of all on the earth. May each help himself to that which his organism allows him to make use of. This the impassable limit fixed by the very nature of beings.

Men accept the exterior manifestations of the principle of authority, stemming from the internal consent that they draw from their belief in the necessity and the legitimacy of authority; some among them add to this reason the conviction that the maintenance of authoritarian institutions is personally beneficial to them. These men belong to the class, more numerous than one would think, of those who believe they are striking a bargain and getting more out of the maintenance of authority than what they sacrifice to it.

Among this number are salaried workers. Their salary has a function linked to governments and all those who are called on to command others take pleasure in exercising this domination, small or great. Outside of the prejudices bringing them to bow before authoritarian forms, they also defend in themselves the source from which they believe they are drawing that which feeds them. Blind, they do not at all see all the well-being, the freedom, the life, that they sacrifice to these institutions who can give them no more than they can naturally have, without paying for it with a humiliating servitude, were it not for these authoritarian forms.

If the men who support authority, believing they draw benefits from it, are being duped, how much more lacking in comprehension are those who believe it necessary to assure the privileges of a certain number of individuals, so that the latter might offer up alms from a bit of their excess.

What would become of the poor if the charity of the rich came up short? What would become of the workers if there were no more bosses, no more powerful companies to make them work? A grave problem, in truth! What *are* these things distributed by those who have and that the people fear seeing disappear along with the privilege of their masters? Nothing on the earth and from that point on, if what they distribute, what gives life, were they not to produce it for themselves, would it not be easy to procure it from the same sources as them?

Of course it would be easy, but there we come up against the fundamental prejudice of the system: *established right**. What they distribute *belongs to them*, no other has the right to touch it. It is in accepting such ideas that one perpetuates the right to life and death of man upon man, not even for the benefit of a few despots alone, but for that of every individual who has, who at any time could set himself up as a supreme judge of life to his kind in according or refusing, according to his wish, the means to maintain or continue his existence.

What to think of those who, being greater in number and strength, have their minds warped to the point of protecting a privilege denying them the right to live in any other way than the will of those who want nothing more than to give them a bit of bread in exchange for hard labor for which they will never harvest the fruits?

Universal pain, the reduction of life, this is where constraint leads. They are all fools: the privileged, those who occupy the social heights as much as those who crawl in the slums of poverty. Blind ignorance, the ones like the others, all contented with half-lives, feeding on half-joys, quick to resignation, to renunciation. And for what? With the celestial tyrants, the cruel and stupid gods of times past, the reasons of these laws made outside of man, not for him, but against him, have passed.

The good should really be the good of man, evil should be what is harmful to him. There is no longer any need for these painful wars between will and need. Hereditary custom can be but a memory and no longer a conscience. There is no grounds for feeling remorse after an act that is in harmony with the organism of he who has carried it out.

If the laws, the codes, are no longer derived from an extra-human authority, then why subordinate his life to men like himself?

So who obliges men to impede their nature, to submit, if not men themselves. If one alone among them has conceived of the idea to make himself obeyed, can he do it without the assent of the masses always ready to stretch their necks out for the collar?

It's to science, to experiment alone, that man must seek his rule of conduct and the direction necessary to his existence. He will note no masters, nor judges, nor a supposed conscience; but only knowledge. To instruct the ignorant, leave wide open the development of their faculties, this is to work with life.

Science and free research make living and acting men; obedience kills them.

Rights and Duties

In the epoch of the all-powerful Roman Church², when supreme authority in the West reigned above the kings and emperors, there was hardly any question of man's *duties*. Duties to the divinity, to the Church, to the sovereign, the bosses, to superiors of all kinds.

The acknowledged rights of the powerful, kings or seigneurs, over the inferior, constituted, in reality, a restriction of their absolute authority. Not allowing them to legitimately exercise their power except inside the

2. Author's note – What is said here about the action of the Roman Church in our civilization could also apply to periods of theocratic supremacy in numerous other civilizations.

limits of powers conferred to them, in the name of the divinity, the Church subordinated the enjoyment of these rights to the carrying out of duties for it and did not hesitate in absolving the subjects of a prince of their obligation to fidelity and obedience, when the prince rebelled against its authority.

If it was this way among the greats, there is no reason to depict the condition of the people. For the peasant, there existed nothing but duties. They never quit preaching to him of humility, resignation, and submission, without ever allowing him to believe that he could, in return, have a right to anything but the joys of heaven.

Centuries pass in this way, when a new conception definitively appeared, summed up by this famous phrase: “*No rights without duties; no duties without rights.*”

As for rights without duties, there weren’t any, for the most powerful were restrained at least by the moral duties of the same doctrine which formed the basis of their rights. “*No duties without rights*” was a newer formulation and appeared to be more revolutionary, though a closer look easily reveals the complete incompatibility existing between the notions of *right* and *duty* and liberty.

The word *right*, generally considered an expression of liberty, sometimes even of revolt, to the contrary contains the notion of submission. This abstract term expresses the legitimacy and consequently implies the acknowledgment of a material or moral authority, of a code distinguishing acts between those that one *must* or one *could* do, and those that *one must not*³ do.

In the legal sense, the rights of individuals are determined by the codes of the country to which they belong. It is a sort of convention, a *modus vivendi*, between people forming their own nation, with that particularity that the rights of citizens are established by a minority among them and that the majority is restrained not to break the limits imposed on it in expressing its needs, the satisfaction of which it has no right.

Even if rights expressed the will of the majority, it would nonetheless remain a barrier blocking the ambitions of certain individuals: thus it is a constraint.

In revolutionary times, and in general for all of those who demand certain specific rights, the word *right* is synonymous to the *desiderata* of those who fight.

3. Tr – “Must” in the original is *doit*, stemming from the verb *devoir*, whereas the noun for duty is also *devoir*.

If this demand manifests by force, it is but an episode marking a struggle between opposing desires, between individuals, some of whom want others to submit to *their* will. If, on the contrary, the demands manifests in so-called legal forms, it's quite simply the permission that those requesting solicit from an authority in whom they recognize the right to accept their demand or reject it, and their very demand is a sign of their dependence.

The notion of right, like that of justice, is intimately connected to the belief in good and evil. Taken in its best acceptance, rights are the expression of what is just, of what is good. As with all abstract ideas, each conceives of right according to their own particular notions and, failing to come to an agreement over the rights belonging to each individual in a society, how can one imagine, determine, or describe what *human rights* are?

Anyone who demands the exercise of a right recognizes thereby that there are things, acts, to which *he has no right*. When someone says: *my rights*, it is understood that what one finds just and good to do and, from then on, all that is outside of these rights constitutes things that are not permitted and not legitimate.

One might admit this expression when it applies to particular cases, speaking, for example, of the rights of two parties in a contract in which each party has imposed certain obligations and assured certain benefits. In this case, restraint, the rule to which one relates is the *contract concluded* according to the will of the participants. But when one speaks of the rights of man where does one see the precise law which determines them? In which laboratories, in which experiment-rooms? Was this discovery made?

Why, in attaching oneself to old words, attempt to restrain human activity? Each truly has *the right* to do what he *can*. Every being can act following his faculties and cannot act otherwise. If he sometimes attempts to breach the limits assigned him by his aptitudes resulting in the composition and decomposition of the elements of which he is formed, sickness, suffering, physical remorse – the only true remorse – will teach him that he surpassed his *power*, that he has *surpassed* his right.

To the formula: "Do what you must," it is appropriate to oppose the lively expression: "Do what you like," for the will of a healthy man is nothing but the manifestation of his need telling him what is good for him to do, what he should normally do.

But, one will object, how, without rules, without constraint, amidst all these differing wills manifesting freely, often conflicting with one another, how could human life be possible?

And how is life possible in the universe? Does one not see, in the eternal movement of matter, diverse elements clashing into one another or uniting in perpetual fights and attractions, and this immense and constant work, does it not create life, is it not existence itself? Why insist on placing men outside of universal laws? In seeking to thwart nature, quite far from improving his lot, humanity has only succeeded in growing the sum of inherent suffering in individual existence with a whole host of torments.

To diminish life, to bind it up in borders goes in precisely the opposite direction of the end that one intends. The constraint imposed on the individual only succeeds in making him hate social life. Often he himself does not clearly understand his feelings, but his acts are the *true* manifestation of this will, this need for expansion to which one is opposed, produces, in denaturing himself, perversions, deviations of the emotions, this whole collection of anormal and harmful acts that we observe in the heart of societies who submit to the ideas of law and right.

Ignorance, and religious superstitions have, on this question, like all of those relating to human life, produced the most disastrous aberrations. Physical life, the body, is hated or at the very least held to be contemptible and inferior to spiritual life (*language of believers*) or to the life of the mind (*language of self-described non-believers*); it naturally results that the most renowned rights, those for which humanity has fought most, have let pour the most blood, are not directly benefitting human life.

It seems that men have been ashamed to demand or rather assert their absolute right to life, to the *whole* of the life of the body outside of which, whatever one might say, there is no life of the mind.

First of all, one has to live and live healthily to think of and carry out healthy acts. "Man does not live on bread alone" says a popular maxim. Sure, he needs quite a number of other foods to nourish his brain, to develop his thought; but he first needs bread.

For a long time, those same ones who declared themselves non-believers and materialists have blushed for having dwelled on such *materialist* preoccupations, and all human effort gives itself over to abstractions. They have demanded the freedom of conscience, the freedom of thought, without thinking that for the poor – illiterate or hastily taught a few rudimentary concepts, more often than not *false* ones, and taken in his youth by exhausting work – there is hardly a question of *thinking freely*, and to act according to *one's thoughts*, the very faculty of thinking ending up almost completely annihilated in his brain, flattened by an unjust life.

They have called for the right to vote: meaning, the right to obedience. The right to declare yourself renounced from being a master over yourself and to submit to the will of a few decision-makers to whom you submit in advance by electing them.

They have called for the right to work, the right for all to occupy all public offices, the right to justice, etc. What is all this if not a delusion, words without meaning? Is the poor man free, other than in theory, to negotiate the price of his labor? No, because he has to eat and thereby is at the mercy of those who have and can give him the means to assuage his hunger.

The more important public offices, does the poor man – apart from rare exceptions – have a right to them other than in theory? Can he acquire the necessary education to claim one? Could he even expect to have the free time necessary to sell his activity at such a high price? No, without a doubt. He immediately has to hand over his arms, his strength, his life: for tomorrow's bread, for tonight's shelter.

Eating, it's all there. The most significant acts, the most brilliant ideas, feed themselves on daily food. Eating is not all of life, but it is the most immediate action tied to life, that which maintains it, conserves it to allow it to then blossom into all productions of thought.

Such a natural *right*, unceasingly reminding man by the imperious demand of every day: humanity seems to *disdain* it. Of course, numerous revolts born out of the cry of famished stomachs, but they were fleeting and have never clearly demanded the absolute right for every man to maintain his existence in giving him the food needed to do so.

People dream of abstractions and feed on chimera. Using their strengths for vain things, eyes fixed to the skies, trumped by those to whom they listen, they span centuries, great words of the ideal on their lips and yet bare feet, kneeling, emaciated by privations, they fall, taken by death – only to have, in their ignorance, left the earth to others, and despised life.

No duties without rights. Rights being considered as a sort of compensation, of recompense awarded for the carrying out of a *duty*, it is really the duty that takes the first place in the phrase and effectively conserves it in social life.

Duty is the obligation to carry out certain generally disagreeable acts and – just like rights – one seeks in vain to find the rule that governs which acts are decreed absolutely necessary. No more than *rights* does *duty* have a reasoned and scientific basis. Drawing on its origin in the old belief in codes given to men by divinities, it changes according to the myths of diverse nations,

following the interests of those who have the skill to impose it on the masses and persuade them to behave in the most advantageous way for them.

Nowhere does nature offer us sanction for these so-called *duties of man*. In us, it has only put the impulse that drives us to carry out an act because we feel its necessity with regards to our own interest.

Limited to social relations, the word *duty* can only really express the obligation that is *freely imposed* on one man by another, be it in the case of an exchange, for services rendered or in any other manner, out of purely personal reasons.

As for *duty* in the absolute sense, it's but a word without meaning, an obstacle to life. In being born, man has contracted not a single obligation, he has given acquiescence to no convention. Later, in the course of his life, the necessity of receiving aid from others brings him to give something of himself in exchange; but how to conceive the pretension that associations called States arrogate to make all men born on a certain stretch of territory bow under rules enacted by people who have in some cases been dead for centuries? And if those newly coming into this earth find those old laws stupid and poorly adapted to the degree of their own evolution, if the form of the association offends them? ... This has been anticipated. To demonstrate to them the excellence of the duties they despise, they are imprisoned. They are eliminated in many ways. In the name of *what* do people act in this way?

There are no more duties to carry out than rights to demand. Only knowledge and experience are capable of indicating to a man what is right for him and the absolute need we all have will be enough to regulate the mutual concessions we make amongst ourselves so as to achieve the greatest good *for each individual*.

Used to bending to constraint, to searching outside of us for the code of our existence, we end up sometimes no longer distinguishing in us the voice of our need. It's this voice that must be reanimated in chasing off all the destructive lies of life.

What do I have to do with words, rights or duties? The needs of my life are conveyed by the desire my body expresses and if that's what it wants, that's what I want.

Man gets frightened, he is afraid of freedom, and of nature permitting everything; he prefers to wait, in order to act, for the permission of the masters to whom he has given himself. What's left of his life after these stifled desires, shattered impulses, distorted instincts? ... Barely the existence of domestic

animals whose master keeps a tight leash on, measuring their drink, their food, air, light; whipping them for the most minor offenses. For man, the master is the ignorance that doesn't allow him to understand or to *will*!

Fictional Characters

One of the primary causes harming the free expansion of the life of man is the existence he accords to a whole host of conventional characters of whom he is the unique creator and to whom he makes himself a slave.

A number of these conceptions of the human mind, such as good, evil, honor, duty, virtue, etc., represent, at their origin, the expression of the will of a power superior to man. The belief in gods being, if not dead, at least very *weakened* in the majority of men, the ideas which follow from them survive and remain thusly without a basis, without any connection to anything, be it reasonable or unreasonable. Divinities in their turn, impose their constraint on man, as cruel as the gods of times past, binding his life up in narrow borders, demanding his obedience – and no longer having the fear of celestial wrath as an excuse, man submits, despairs, ruins his life, without finding in himself enough reason to throw the idols from their thrones while laughing at his past credulity.

A whole collection of false sentiments encumbers the brain and hinders the lives of those who accept the yoke of these phantoms. How many struggles they engender! What strengths lost to life! What a harvest it is, for death, this mass of men tortured by shame, remorse, succumbing under the weight of evils with no reality when illness and natural accidents produce an already too great sum of inevitable suffering.

Abstract ideas, though governing men, nevertheless vary among each individual, according to his particular dispositions, and the antagonism existing between their life and the lives of individual people is less evident than that which exists between the individual life of a man and that of a certain species of fictional characters. The latter gain a semblance of existence from human lives, whose union serves to create them: fatherland, state, church, party, family, etc., and, in general, every collective tends to constitute its own personality under a name designating the group, without echoing the individualities of whom it is composed.

The search for an easier and better life has most likely been the goal of man since his first attempts at forming groups. Uniting to defend themselves against natural forces or to resist enemies; to insure, by exchange, the satisfaction of needs they are unable to provide by their own strength alone;

making groups in order to complete or embellish their life in engaging the faculties of others, offering in return the resources of their activity to the community, in reality, men follow a single motive: the desire for well-being, the greatest satisfaction obtained by means of association, in a word, the search for personal happiness.

The initial utilitarian notion disappears little by little in the majority of groupings and one sees that little by little with their growth, as the *association comes to life*, the intensity of life diminishes for the associates. In this way many of them have come to live, it seems, a special life of their own, absolutely separated from that of the men composing it – even offering this strangeness of having interests contrary to those of *all* the associates and imposing their tyrannical authority to such a point that the men sacrifice the real good of their existence for the conservation or the interests of these chimerical beings.

Everyday language, reflecting the idea of individual life connected to these modern idols, refers to them as actually living beings. Does one not say: “State secrets, reasons of the state” as if the State were endowed with a brain allowing it to reason? Could the reason of the State be anything but the reasoning of a few individuals governing their fellow men? Does one not speak fervently in defense of the fatherland? Does this defense not consist in killing the men of this fatherland, without whom it wouldn’t exist?

Around these puppets, as around the statues of gods in older times, the army of preachers and servants of these lay cults stand guard. Living off of the sacrifices that the people offer to these idols, they are always ready to offer the aid of their voice or their arms to express the oracles or vengeance of the inert divinity. But so skeptical, so clever as they are, it is not uncommon to see even them chased from the sanctuary and, back among the flock of simple believers to then be crushed by the power of which they had themselves been defenders.

Even the names given to these beings seem, in certain cases, to defy common sense. Does one not say: “society”? This word, expressing the idea of voluntary association, or a grouping wanted by individuals desiring to draw some benefit from their union, does it currently designate anything but an agglomeration of men into which all are incorporated by force, from the moment of their birth⁴ when, for better or worse, they must submit to the rules established without their consent and out of which they have no way of getting? A strange society is one which is composed of people who didn’t ask to join and which, in place of simply saying “withdraw” to whoever is not

4 You would even have to say: before their birth, since the pregnant woman is not a master of that which still makes up a part of her and that “society”, reducing her to the level of productive animal, enjoins her, under penalty of punishment, to keep for its service, for its armies, a being not yet having its own existence. (ADN)

satisfied in it, arrogates itself the right to chastise him, kill him, as if violating a treaty on which he was never consulted, to which he has never consented.

“Society” for that matter also speaks of the right it has to defend its unreal existence and it exercises it largely in brutally or hypocritically destroying the *discontented* members of society, those who, finding themselves frustrated by the association, have the desire to band together following another method.

All these fictional powers, before which men bow, are nothing in themselves and their artificial existence is completely taken from the parts of life which men take from themselves to give to them.

The stronger the fatherlands, societies and other abstractions of this sort, the weaker the lives of the individuals and, the day these phantoms disappear, man will be surprised at his power of life: a power that he cannot imagine under current fetters.

Men, in general, are not made to live alone. The many needs of their material existence and no less important needs of their cerebral activity can only hope for satisfaction with the support of great numbers of their fellow men. Solidarity, association, necessarily are imposed on man wanting to leave the purely animal life; but, small or large groupings, whatever their nature or particular goals, have no reason for being unless they are constituted with an eye to the interests of the individuals comprising it and their greatest benefit.

Society is there for man and not man for society. Far from having to bow before the impersonal authority of groupings, man should, without hesitation, sacrifice their fictional interests to the satisfaction of his needs. As soon as the society in which he finds himself obstructs freedoms, impedes the aspirations of the individual, he should be able to remove himself from it, for it has ceased to suit him. Either he looks for another grouping, or lives alone, according to his desire – never should a man, a real and living being, neglect his desires for an abstraction, nor suffer the imposition of acts for which he feels no need.

There is a strong solidarity working for the benefit and the well-being of one's fellow men and a harmful solidarity pushing man to sacrifice himself for a word: because one has labeled him under the name of Turk, Russian, or English; or under that of catholic or Mohammedi; or because he himself has accepted the label of a party calling itself royalist, republican, socialist, or whatever other thing.

Are there on this earth two men who think absolutely alike on all points, leading an identical life and able to continue to think and live in the same manner for their entire existence? Would this not require, aside from an

absolutely identical physical conformity, that they would have had the same education, learned the same things, and lived in the same environments? It's insane to think of it! Is it not even more insane, for men, to enroll into an association, to organize themselves under some flag, to impose fixed laws and to want always to march together, in whatever circumstances, while their individualities make them so different from one another? And to achieve this goal they invoke discipline, abnegation, a whole host of mendacious theories all leading to the same result: the diminution of individual life.

It cannot be repeated enough: the most important part of this question is to accept the non-existence of fictional characters. When someone says: the future of the race, happiness, the greatness of the fatherland, etc., it must be understood: the *fate* coming to individuals composing the race, the conditions of the minds and existences of men comprising the fatherland. Is there not, in a particular form, an echo of the old struggle between an erroneous spiritualism and scientific materialism? Does the abstract idea not need to become embodied in matter for it to become real and tangible for us?

Obey, submit, resign yourself to ignorance, to your poverty, so that "society" be strong and happy, they tell us; an association cannot have a life outside of that of its members, we respond. It is vile if they are vile, ignorant if they are ignorant, poor if they are poor: every infliction endured by one of the individuals composing it increases the sum of general suffering and no miracle is capable of transforming individual ignorance and misery into collective knowledge and well-being.

Nothing is more false and more dangerous than believing that resignation, abnegation of oneself, practiced by each and every one, can be a virtue for the collective. How from the pain of each man do you intend to constitute the happiness of humanity?

How from individual constraint can you think of giving rise to freedom for all?

On the Pursuit of Happiness in the Present

Quick to resignation in the face of suffering, man places, in general, rather little energy into the pursuit of happiness; he seems to fear it despite wanting it and delays the coming to term of the dream of bliss that, despite everything and despite himself, he keeps forever at the heart of his thoughts.

In the natural man, in the healthy being, whose reasoning hasn't been distorted by education – if that is, such a man exists at present – as soon as a desire arises, actions immediately aim to its quickest realization.

Those who the first humans sought to employ, to work their fellows to create a surplus of satisfaction for themselves doubtless had to fight against the powerful instinct of beings who were frustrated and ignorant, but full of vitality. These men, with a poorly developed but not deformed mentality, would not allow the sacrifices without hope of a return.

To get them to abandon satisfactions they felt drawn to, they had to make them believe that this sacrifice was temporary and that the benefits of which they had deprived themselves, they would find hundredfold in another existence.

Pushed by the natural desire for happiness, men, not finding the satisfactions they dream of on earth, very likely were taken to imagining another, better life, from the first moment of their thinking. It is in the contest of multiple causes that transformations are established. But if the preachings of those desiring to spread the faith in extraterrestrial compensations would find a well-prepared soil, it nevertheless must be recognized that this belief had no more zealous propagator than the despotism of which it was the biggest supporter and that more than any other, it contributed to making all injustices and spoliation accepted.

The nature of hoped-for compensations vary according to the individual. Some, believing in the continuation of perceptions after the sensory organs are destroyed, dream of abundant hunts, endlessly renewed feasts, such as those tribes in which food shortages are common; the Muslim believes in a paradise whose gushing fountains contrast with the aridity of the sandy countries where suffering from thirst is common; others, finally, imagine less material pleasures. But what they seek in vain with all these beliefs is a connection between the conditions of our current existence with those of future lives.

What need is there to be poor, ignorant, and destitute *now* in order to be happy later? Is poverty the mother of wealth, ignorance of knowledge?

On this point believers do not explain: "We will be compensated one day" they say. Compensated for what? For having gotten by stupidly, for having atrophied their faculties, for having been useless to others and themselves? When the unhappy console themselves for their misery, do they not know that religion promises the same celestial bliss to the rich, to the happy, deserving, for their prayers or sacrifice of a little of their surplus, these same extraterrestrial pleasures that they themselves are exhorted to buy at the cost of sacrificing all of their desires, their whole life? So why do they renounce their bit of immediate happiness since nothing prevents them from demanding at the same time the problematic felicities of Paradise?

The roman church – the one that improperly gives itself the title of catholic⁵ – has never seen its equal when it comes to distorting minds and the way in which men have accepted its teachings, that it openly contradicts in its conduct, is a sad example of their thoughtlessness and blindness.

“Blessed are the poor, those who suffer and cry. Blessed are the meek, those who submit and relinquish,” it says. And for centuries the people have cried in silence, not revolting against injustice and cruelty, dragging their poverty to the doors of churches and convents, to palace doors from where, sometimes, a little bread drops. The Church, however, doesn’t concern itself with being benevolent in the manner of the poor and meek. Its princes, its dignitaries, were hungry for domination, for pleasure; they kneeled before them, they kissed their feet; they were rich with all the riches the people had given up to them, their good meals were made from the crowd’s lack of bread. Their luxurious clothing, the whole splendor of their existence comes from the distress of the poor.

The faith maintained by the clever production of the cult, men, across the illuminated churches, through the clouds of incense and the harmonies of sacred chants, catch a glimpse of the enchanting image: paradise, where “all tears are wiped away” and they pick their burdensome loads up again.

Is it really in the past tense that we should speak of these things? Have our contemporaries all recanted these mendacious beliefs? Alas, no!

Without delving here into the study of any particular dogma, is it not useful to say to the believers of all cults: “Your priests deceive you when they make merits out of suffering and ignorance. Watch how they act, you will see that they are hardly striving for Heaven by the means they are proposing to you. You who believe in the survival of thought, which you call your soul, you must realize that suffering, the excess of work, can only distance you from the aim you pursue and, in depressing your faculties, in brutalizing yourselves, you come closer not to angels, but beasts”.

If the believer is, in some way, excusable for distancing the realization of this dreams and happiness, what to think of those who, without expecting any compensation of a beyond the existence of which they deny, accept suffering with the same resignation! They have faith in the happiness of coming generations. It’s enough for them to believe that the existence of their great grandchildren will realize the most perfect conception of the social life for

5 Catholic signifies, in greek, “universal.” At the very most, statistics give us 254 million roman catholics, meaning less than a sixth of men (at the end of the XIX century). (ADN)

which they submit to their poverty, abnegating their personal desires in the “hope” of this ideal happiness that they should not taste, of which they will never be witness.

The believer says: “Later, in paradise” while the revolutionary says: “Later, after the revolution” which seems to me to be similar in spirit, if putting forward different ideas. The words mean little, paradise and revolution are, in this case, illusions, the one like the other. What mustn’t be said is “later.”

Later, tomorrow, where will we be? What will have become of our individual existence? Is it not rather today, in the present moment, that we should live, which is to say, to strive to achieve the greatest sum of happiness? Is it not while we are alive that we must live?

Minds are so little accustomed to such reasonings, the legacy of long centuries of moral and material constraint has so habituated us to resign to suffering that this perpetual struggle for happiness seems, to most men, an overbearing weariness. Their depressed individuality does not feel strong enough to enter into combat, to go off to their death, carried along among the torrent of utterly exhausted or never awakened energies.

The believer imagines that the passage from this world to another is enough to change all of man’s dispositions and feelings and the revolutionary hoping for the same result from the revolution proves the same naïveté. So who will make this revolution? Men, correct? Should one not conclude from this that their mentality is worth as much as their revolution: their charity.

If, finding the conception of individual and immediate happiness that is focused on the self alone to be egotistical and restrained, one prefers out of attachment to the remnants of erroneous ideas from the past, to seek a more distant goal of happiness for the future of humanity, one must recognize however the necessity to first of all work on one’s own well-being. A generation of weakened men, with atrophied brains: will this engender a vigorous and intelligent generation? That is hardly likely.

The continuous search for happiness is a habit to pick up; it’s an education to undertake, an internal revolution that should individually transform individuals accustomed to passivity and resignation. All men say, of course, that they wish to be happy. But for the few who insist, how many are there who would add then that this is a vain dream, utopia, that it is impossible for all men to be happy, that there will always be material poverty, always moral suffering? And it’s mostly the poorest who speak like this.

How much the conditions of life would change if men understood that outside of accidents caused by natural forces, all the pains they suffer only exist because they want to support them, that they were created by men and men could eliminate them; if everyone, in short, sought to destroy in himself all prejudices, all obstacles opposed to the freedom of his acts and sought, down to the littlest of things, to always have his own true happiness in mind! How different from this vain wait made as much by laziness instead of effort as ignorance of the causes of suffering!

What would be changed tomorrow or after the revolution (if men have a revolution)? The air, the water, the earth, everything would be the same.

Man has no help to expect from the outside, nothing will come but from himself. The modification of his mentality alone can bring about real social transformations.

To put off to tomorrow, to later, the satisfaction that one could taste in the present moment is the worst of follies. Is this minute not only the one of which we may be certain? Is our individual existence not *all* for us? Is it not in it and by it alone that we perceive all things? From there, does not the only truth consist in living as fully, as wholly as possible, in each and every moment that makes up this existence?

Our personality has no real life except in the present moment. Tomorrow is not yet “us,”—will it ever, our individuality that is, last that long?

It's folly to scorn the present to hope in the future. Folly to place one's dream of happiness in an uncertain later or in men that we cannot at all know, in sensations which we will never ourselves to feel. Folly, great folly to not live with all the intensity possible, while life is ours!

On the Antagonism of Interests

The more man distances himself from his origins, the more his mentality develops and also the more his needs grow. Each new faculty that awakens in him, enlarging his life, also enhances his activity and demands new satisfactions.

If the primitive man could live almost completely isolated in the forests, in prehistoric times, only occasionally gathering with a few others to carry out a difficult hunt or to defend against some threat, it's because of the excessively restricted number of needs he had, barely rising above those of wild animals, necessitating only occasional aid from others for satisfaction. It's only uniting

by with one's fellow men that the contemporary man can escape the miserable conditions of his first ancestors, effectively fight against the adverse forces of nature, defend his life and adorn it while growing his resources in all domains. But to be truly beneficial, the association should correspond to the interests of all its members and be truly desired by them.

You do not have to be very knowledgeable nor commit oneself to long observations to see that human groupings in no way answer the needs of individuals and that, far from relieving their effort, from making their lives easier – which is the first *raison d'être* of an association among men – societies increase the bitterness of the struggle, in augmenting the tiresome side, in substituting the struggle of man against nature with that of man against man.

One wonders in vain what the precise advantage men get from their assembling in society. If the isolated man, wandering the land, risks frequently lacking what he needs for his existence, beginning with the most primary necessity: food, the individual subjected to social enslavement is no more sure of getting what his nature demands, no contract guarantees him even simple bread. Just like his first ancestors, once on uncultivated earth, he has to fight to get his food. While they, at least, do not come to blows one against the other except when a food shortage drove them to it, a great number of our contemporaries don't eat every day but for disputing with others for the bread that should nourish them.

What is competition if not a hypocritical term designating this perpetual combat of one against another, this war without end, that goes on, implacable in the heart of our societies; a struggle, not only awful for the pain it engenders, but stupid as well, because you cannot even expect it to develop physical strength or intelligence! The vigor of the body or the mind has but very little influence on these fights. One cannot hope that the most beautiful specimens of the race, eliminating the others, will create even more beautiful and perfect generations; this latter logic, with which nature sometimes seems to excuse the struggles that take place within it, is one which societies banish. The strongest is the one who has; he will win and survive, while often the robust and intelligent will vanish.

The basis of current societies is not union and the sharing of interests among the members composing them, but quite to the contrary, the division and opposition of these interests. It is by an artificial competition, pushed to an extreme, that they subsist, exploiting, it seems, the suffering of the masses for the benefit of a privileged minority – but in reality restraining all the goodness and life that man would find in a natural association. This harmful association comes about in the most unreasonable way; not only do men have conflicts of interest with their co-associates, but their own end up contradicting one another.

Does the judicial world not have complete interest – as it seems at first – in the preservation of criminality, dishonest transaction, all harmful acts owing to which it exists? No, not entirely.

Those criminals who, out of poverty or mental perversion, harm their fellow men alone justify the existence of the judicial body. In legitimating, by all appearances, one of these institutions, they contribute to the upholding of the social state that led them to the crime, which lets other individuals in the same milieu grow, preparing them for the same harmful tasks, dooming them to the same punishments, and so they eternalize the procession of the impoverished who feed a part of their fellow men at the price of pain for others and their own misfortune.

As individuals, each member of the judiciary body has a completely different interest, because the existence of criminality in all its forms makes it run, for the same reasons as its co-citizens, the risk of becoming a victim of a state of affairs where crime, the lack of integrity are necessary to the functioning of one of the wheels of the social organization.

Do military leaders not have an interest in what perpetuates the stupid hatreds between peoples, which alone allow them to subsist in their function? A now historic example, however, demonstrates how much these very interests are harmful to the individual and how much he can suffer when the bad, anti-human seed of the institution he supports, so long as it chooses its victims elsewhere, winds up turning back on him.

Massacres among men can only be understood in these barbarous periods where the lack of food, the real struggle for life, constrained people to throw themselves onto their neighbors to take what they had or, sometimes, to feed on their neighbors themselves. By what blunders have men come to kill one another for a despot's or minister's ambition, for a diplomat's words, financiers' schemes or any other cause of which they're absolutely ignorant and which has nothing to do with them?

Many sentimental words have been spoken against war, what has been the result? Nothing. For that matter, man does not need to preoccupy himself with an ever-dubious sentiment. For him one thing alone is real: his interest; it is that alone that he should consult in everything and always. War is awful, but that is not why it must be refused. In primitive struggles, when the famished individual's life was at stake, his interest pushed him to take the food of his fellow man, to end a life to prolong his own; he was in the right to do it for himself. His instinct told him "Live!" and his will to life was his severe and unquestionable right.

Nature does not have our sentimentalities nor does it have our imbecilic cruelties. On this question there is no need for pity or tears. War and militarism are dupery for the people, for all people, and that's why they should refuse it.

What interest could an intellectual worker or a manual worker have in a war? What would they *gain* from it? Most often, they own nothing, those who they call their compatriots having left them nothing. And on the other side of the river or mountain, beyond the oceans, as far as the eye can see, everywhere thought carries, one sees man fighting and suffering for bread, fighting and suffering for science, and other men turning away from life.

No matter the color and language of he who is master, no matter the soil on which one lives, if one cannot eat, or think, or act according to his strength and desire! The enemy is the master, every master. The enemy is in all countries, in everyone who can say to another: "I want." And yet more truly, the enemy is in every man, in the ignorance alone that creates masters.

The family does not escape this law of our societies that places turmoil where, on the contrary, the most whole union should exist. With the current system of property, can children not have an interest in the death of their parents, for the inheritance? It isn't sentimentality that holds us together. In most cases the death of the parents bring an amelioration of their children's existence, whether they inherit, or whether this death delivers them from an often heavy burden, for workers often having their own children to feed. So who created such lamentable situations, such regrettable conflicts between affective sentiments and the needs of life, if not a hypocritical society calling itself the protector of the family, against those who want it freely organized, by the only lines of affection, without the opposition of interests able to throw turmoil or disunion into it?

Need one continue to cite the doctors, the sellers of remedies, obliged to count on the sorry state of public health to keep their source of revenue, thus having a direct interest in the cases of ailments being numerous, even if they have to show the deleterious influence of an unhealthy environment? Does one not see that the most human, the most useful, that which could be beneficial above all is science working toward maintaining the healthy and robust man? The same thing that becomes detrimental to the individual, just as everything that encloses and lives in our society, strong only to do harm, powerless to do good, spreading the flaw of their false principal to everything they touch: the antagonism of human interests.

The struggle between diverse interests, such a disastrous struggle for the well-being of humanity, goes on more bitterly and more visibly, above all else, in the world of workers.

The products of work do not directly satisfy the needs of the producers, either they use them for themselves or they exchange them for other objects or any other source of well-being. These products are arbitrarily given a currency value: an absolutely fictitious value, since the currency, equivalent to the produced object, does not come from the one who made the object, nor from the one who furnished the raw material; a large part of it is allocated to a man who in no way took part in the real work.

Production doesn't happen with the aim of satisfying the needs of society as a whole. Those who have cash simply employ themselves in growing the amount of cash as a means of acquiring everything without personally working. The worker, on the contrary, cannot directly exchange his work for the things necessary for his life; he must pass through the intermediary of currency, that he works for someone who can give it to him, so, in this he is always being conned. Never will he draw the value of his work equaling that which he produced; the difference existing between the salary paid to the worker, the price of the raw material and the sale price goes to the one who hired the work. From which it follows that if all who had cooperated in the making of an object – including the one who furnished the raw material – wanted to become its owners, they would have to pay for it with a sum greater than that of their combined salaries. Where to take the difference? In working more, in making, for example, two objects so as to be able to buy another; meaning increasing, by a distribution of profits, the wealth of another to one's own detriment. From which it follows that any given instant given by the worker to working, every effort made by him to attain the money necessary for his subsistence, contributes at the same time to growing the wealth of which he will never take part and a power which turns against him.

If production were exchanged directly for a production of another type, the individual's avidity, his desire, even if excessive, to possess many things, would contribute still to the general wealth, for, producing much in order to make numerous exchanges, the individual, while increasing his well-being, would put extra elements into circulation for the social good. With the intermediary of currency, the initiative and effort of individuals cannot produce any of these results. Firstly the individual is not free to work when he pleases, as much as he pleases. Even if he were free in that, he wouldn't any longer be so to exchange a surplus of well-being for the fruits of his additional work. An overproduction has no other effects in the current system than to lower the price of overabundant goods, and, quite naturally, the wages of those who make them. With such a game of balance, it is impossible for workers to seriously improve their situation, with their own work as the means. Without the money at their disposal, and not able to do without it to live, they remain at the mercy of those who can give it to them, and they will only do so insofar as it is in their interest, meaning that they will give about enough to live on to

those who are useful to them and reject the others. It is impossible for things to be otherwise. Those who employ workers are, themselves as well, faced with competition, they have to struggle, meaning they obtain the maximum effort for the minimum wages at the risk of falling themselves into the class who has nothing.

Production does not reign on the real needs of men but the interest of some, the number of those who are not permitted to work even become useful to these specific interests, while it is harmful to the rest of men. In any case, these 'unemployed,' themselves poor, are a cause of poverty for others. Firstly, by the competition that necessity constrains them to put on those who work; then, because production being reduced from the whole sum of work that they would have done, various products are less accessible to all, are more expensive, forcing the worker to work more to attain them, which contributes to keeping him in his poverty and obliges him to accept wages to live normally.

In summary, as soon as one accepts the perpetual possession of an individual of things he can himself give value, one changes the members of society into essentially enemies, those who have to seek to conserve, and expand what they call their property, not even leaving to others the faculty to apply themselves to create new social values outside of them.

This is not generally how workers consider things; the enemy for them is the one they can see up close, ready to obtain that which they are refused: a place, work, starvation wages, whatever servitude for which he appears most apt or docile. He, depending on the situation, is the non-union worker or the foreigner, or the jew, or whoever: a poor person the other poor persons go after. The moment has not yet come when one will renounce the stupid pact by virtue of which the tailor can end up in rags after having spent his life sewing clothing and the mason dies from lack of shelter after having cemented so many stones for others' homes.

If, in our minds, one goes back through the course of centuries, one sees, as one approaches the primitive man, the effort increases in inverse relation to the quantity of work achieved. Without speaking of those of our ancestors, laboriously breaking flint to make crude tools, one can quite well realize that the slowness and difficulty with which artisans in the middle ages or even simply one hundred years ago worked. The prodigious development of mechanization came to upset all of the conditions of work. The chores of ten robust men carried out with strain can be accomplished by a child turning a crank or pushing a button – with ease today. Progress, far from slowing down, grows, accumulates without end. Machines make other machines, every day we see a new one appear, more powerful than its predecessors and responding to new needs.

What more enchanting ideal could be offered to humanity: to see the production of all things multiply ten- and one-hundred fold without fatigue for man, the robust and tireless steelworkers demanding but a little surveillance, and with men freed from excess work, would from then on use the time once spent bent over working satisfying himself instead.

This sweet dream, humanity has not had; it has not wanted to see that reality offers, on earth, better than the paradise with which his ignorance is duped.

With the present organization of our societies, the machine could not be built except by the rich man. Once built, it is thus the property of the rich man, and the docile servant of this man becomes a wretched beast, competing with and rival to the worker who can only find favor by becoming a slave to this machine by means of which he can assure himself leisure and freedom.

There where production demands competition of a multitude of workers, today making gigantic wheels move, the cast-iron levers perpetually moving. Logically should they not be busy for the shortest lengths of time at the shortest of chores, pleased to have been replaced by the machine? That is, after all, the result which healthy minds would come to; but what reasonable solutions could one hope for a humanity in which the faculty to reflect and above all conclude has for so many centuries been demoralized and atrophied?

He who sacrifices part of his property to possess a mechanical workshop expects that it will earn back with interest what it cost him. He cannot continue to pay workers whose aid is no longer necessary to him. However, the men having become useless to him, how will they eat, since, in our society, the worker is ranked with the domestic animal, living by the grace of and according to the whim of his masters?

In light of these outcomes, hatred has risen up against the unconscious machine. That is what must be fought and destroyed, that's what starves the worker! Thusly, lacking reflection, man rises up against progress, against science, the only sources of life and well-being. There are thousands of workers hoping to return to their previous jobs, while *many work and produce little*.

The elimination of machines, if it were possible, would have no other effect, in restraining production, than rendering even less accessible to all a whole host of things that have become everyday items and contributing to the stupefying of people by reducing even more the little time left to workers to educate themselves and to think. What would result from this return to the past, if not more suffering corresponding still to more servitude?

The development of mechanization, with the current social system, that is the competition of the inert thing against the man who created it, the

workers create their own property in building engines designed to replace them tomorrow, constrained by the immediate need, by the necessity to buy their daily bread, to carry out the work expected of them, though they will die of it later.

So, what to do?

So, perhaps it would be time to reflect and to understand that those who suffer, suffer not by the existence of an ineluctable law of nature from which it is impossible to liberate themselves, but because of false ideas that dominate them.

The machine is the good and robust servant that must be welcomed into the human family with joy. That is not the enemy. The enemy is the erroneous conception one has of social life. It is the multitudes of men used to seeing that a minority of their peers have free disposal to the goods of the earth while the majority has no other desire, no other hope, than to be admitted to work for others, not imagining that the individual child, born poor, could have the right to eat and live other than by the grace of masters who deign to make use of him.

A competition of another type threatens the workers. The installation of machines that make work easier has permitted the replacement, in many industries, of men with women and even children. The employer has much interest in preferring them for hire, for they get a smaller salary, whenever the nature of the work allows.

Now, if one thinks about it, one sees that the workers, to supplement their wages, which aren't enough for getting by, at the right moment, are pushed to ask for a supplement of their earnings from the work of their wives and children. This surplus, seems, in effect, like it should augment their resources, but on the other hand, this increasing sum of workers, women and children content with lower wages, could bring about a general reduction in wages and toss the male workers who won't work for reduced wages on the street.

One could then say, without error, that in the children they brought into the world, manual workers prepare so many competitors who won't wait until adulthood to replace their fathers in many industries.

Given this outcome, it seems superfluous to pompously celebrate the advantages of our civilization. Who profits from this civilization and all this material progress? Some. The philosopher might even say: none. The suffering engendered, in the upper social classes by erroneous ideas, cede it but very little, perhaps, to the one produced by material poverty among the people.

For some, life is embellished by the inventions and resources born from science, but is not the immense crowd still at the incessant struggle for food like our ancestors in prehistoric times? The conditions of existence have improved, you might say, and you can't compare the life of cave dwellers with that of our contemporaries. The poor crawl and bustle about *pêle-mêle* in wet cellars, in stinking hovels: all they whose next-day's bread is never sure, who only conquer it by depriving the others who are poor like themselves, who see their friends and children becoming one another's enemies; all this obscure and frightful struggle of the poor willing to throw themselves at one another, fighting for the "privilege" of working for the man who dangles a bit of bread in front of them, a bit that could barely satisfy them; all this does not invoke a life so superior to that of primitive humans.

In vain science enlarges humanity's horizons even more, in vain it proves wrong the immutable moral and religious principles that nothing in nature proves, it demonstrates society's false foundations and absurd laws, this society which wants to live on despite it and for that seeks to silence its voice or to reduce it to a state of sterile erudition, when it should be the only guide of man.

What harmony is there between socially imposed acts and the current state of our scientific knowledge? None. Our codes date to the Romans, our conception of authority and a whole host of so-called principles have been the same for centuries, while men imagine the blue of the sky is a crystal canopy above which strolls God and his court.

This discord between acquired truths, by science and social conventions, merits being examined in a number of its effects.

Has science not been the biggest guardian of human life, is it not what teaches us about sickness, to keep away mortal influences that can attack our organization with hygiene? But the salutary teachings crucial to liberating man from a huge amount of suffering, to limiting premature deaths, so numerous at present, these teachings remain useless.

The poor man does not have the leisure to learn how to safeguard his health and his life, and if he did, what would this vain knowledge serve him? The society that makes him "poor," does it not oblige him, under threat of immediate death by hunger, to do any task, unhealthy or no, that might bring him bread?

Is it even possible for him to take the necessary and elaborate precautions to attenuate the harmful effects of his job? Surely not, it is not the workers who build the workshops or factories in which they spend their existence to

their own liking. The masters come there but rarely, and for brief moments; the shareholders getting the profits of the work done far away from them, who will never see the place where men who nature has made their neighbors struggle to pay their rents; it is they who decide what is best. They measure the space, air, light, discuss improvements not from the standpoint of health, but from that of their profit. Limit expenses, grow the dividends: it's all there. As for the poor, if they die early, so what! Just like domesticated animals, they reproduce enough that the company need not worry. The poor, meaning the beast of burden, will not be lacking for some time to come.

At the end of his workday, more unhealthiness awaits the worker in the too tiny buildings, in the stinking habitation where, in our cities, the renters pack in, twenty households occupy the floor space where two families could barely find the space demanded for hygiene.

Air, light, big rooms where the sun visits the tiniest nook, killing harmful germs therein; trees, gardens, this is what science says. Land is expensive, says society, it belongs to a master who must make the most money off it as possible. The State taxes the air, the windows are accounted for, and they are built high and straight, the smallest corner, dark or no, finds its destination. In place of gardens there are ventilation shafts where thousands of men can make do breathing a mephitic air already breathed in and exhaled twenty times by their neighbors, stinking from the latrines next door, poisoned from tuberculosis across the way. This minimum of air where a truly healthy animal would die, heredity and custom aid, they vegetate there for years, anemic, sickly, engendering even more debilitated beings.

Science tells us that to keep in good health, a man needs clean and ample food. Yet the poor man, is he not obliged to make do with adulterated commodity foods in insufficient portions due for lack of the means to procure others?

Science can show the means for achieving health, but these means are not within reach to all and it seems that the majority of men easily resign themselves to leave the privilege to the masters to whom they give themselves.

No one to blame, says science, because no one acts entirely alone.

Christianity, in persuading men to take pride in their so-called liberty, has but added one more slavery, that nothing justifies, to the natural dependence of the individual vis-à-vis the group. This false notion of human freedom has never been anything but a trap destined to deprive man of his real independence.⁶ "You will submit because you are free," such is the bizarre formula through which one might define the attitude of societies against individuals. "You are dependent on a thousand causes and subject to a thousand influences" says science to man; so live according to your own

nature; no one has the right to judge you, nor to demand your submission to a rule that you do not feel in yourself.

We are not free to think, act, want. What about that can take our dignity? Are we free to be tall or short, according to our whim, to resemble this or that parent, to have eyes or hair of this or that color? Have we ever thought to find humiliating being subject in this to reasons that more often than not are impossible for us to discern?

The constitution of our brain, like that of our body, is first of all determined by causes anterior to its foundation. The raw material serving for its composition is taken from the body of our ancestors. If they transmit their predispositions to certain particular diseases or certain physical resemblances, how can you expect that the thinking organ remains unharmed from every influence and does not reproduce special dispositions of our ascendants in its circumsolutions and, consequently, think in the same manner? Heredity and atavism are things too well-known to need to go on; but because of the persistence of the desire to continue, against all good sense, to split universal life into spirit and matter, one accepts physical heredity and denies mental heredity; or better yet, one accepts the latter and while saying of a man "He acts like his father." They punish him if they find the act in disaccord with current opinion; without asking if it is possible that this man avoid reproducing an act already carried out by his father – an act resulting from dispositions either physically or mentally inherited – while it is impossible to avoid have a beard of the same color or a nose of the same shape as his father.

Atavistic and hereditary influence are the first to exercise their influence on the individual in determining the special build of his body; all the same, the tendency of nature to reproduce in him the ancestral dispositions find themselves attenuated by the circumstances amidst which the life of the new being develops, circumstances, which cannot be identical to those having surrounded the existence of his antecedents and which will be the cause of dissimilarities between individual and his ancestors.⁷

Without waiting for birth, exterior influences act on the embryo starting at the moment of its conception. The parents' state of health, various influences at the moment of procreation; the quality and type of the mother's food, the nature of her occupations, incidents or accidents of her life during pregnancy

6 One could object that other, non-christian societies, in punishing the individual for certain acts, also seems to proclaim the liberty of will. The white race, being currently the head of civilization, it is above all within it that one has attempted – to satisfy the demands of a more developed mentality – to explain to the individual the motives which form the basis of his submission. A great number of other peoples completely ignore that which we would call good and evil and obey only constraint. They are not exactly punished for having done harm, but because they have offended the master or violated the laws he enacted according to his desires (ADN).

are so many causes intervening in the development of the forming man. After the birth, the conditions are more or less wholesome, care being more or less intelligent around early childhood, the well-being which the child enjoys, or the privations he suffers transform in their turn his body, preparing the acts that his nature thusly modified will suggest to him later.

The first part of the human life is still quite poorly grasped by the great majority. The child seems but an object and, because the activity of his sense do not yet at all manifest, one judges it useless to preoccupy himself with the way they develop. Yet the object becomes a being, he speaks, walks, acts, reasons in his way. Immediately, the educators seize upon him, and by educators one should not only understand those with the title: private tutors or school teachers. Educators are legion around the child, the most significant, those who exercise the most influence are often those who don't even realize it. They are everyone who he sees acting around him, all whose opinions he hears, advice, examples, lessons, or corrections: the mother who gives him a slap on the left hand, teaches him only to serve himself with the right, the older sister who he sees secretly plunge a finger into the jelly, according to whether she is caught in the act and punished or enjoys with impunity: baby learns a lesson. Educator, the drunk or sober, brutal or sweet father; the servants, childhood friends, animals, objects, even. Educator most of all, the environment in which the child lives and that he observes, noting his first sights his new brain, so malleable that a nothing could leave a deep trace. Who would deny the influence of education in childhood? Is it not because experience has demonstrated its incontestable effects on the direction it gives to the life of the individual, that all parties, all sects, all those who tend to dominate men take pains to overwhelm the children, to plant the seed that they want to see sprout later on?

Yet the adolescent escapes from this period officially consecrated to "forming" him.⁸ It is then that he is told about freedom and that he really considers himself free. How could he? With what will he reflect on his surroundings? Is it not with the same brain, the same body, born of his ancestors, taking his material from them? Is it not with the cerebral cells influenced, modified in so many diverse ways in the time of his youth and conserving in their inner structure all the causes that have acted on them? Is it that each new event that comes to shake the brain, the memory,

7 Sometimes, the circumstances of the environment in which the individual is engendered and lives permits the development of mental tendencies or of physical particularities that remained in a latent state, thusly reproducing, under the influence of often unknown causes, a person very different from his close parents and sometimes recalling distant ancestors.

8 This word is the official term; it is found on every school prospectus. How an individual has that has been "formed," meaning whose nature has been modified to bring out a resemblance to a "model person." How can this individual speak of his freedom? (ADN)

conscious or no, the whole past once recorded by the body – does it not vibrate, transforming the appreciation of a new event by the modification that the thought will undergo in passing through the old regions of thought, perhaps forgotten but still alive if not in themselves than in the thoughts they engendered?

If the brain is the specific organ of thought, it has yet to undergo the influence of the entire body to which it is intimately tied. The quantity of blood sent it from the heart moderates or increases its activity. Food digested by the stomach influences the quality of the blood. All the organs exercise their influence on thought. The functioning of these organs, the modifications they undergo, are thus of an extreme importance and, just as with the ideas deposited in our brains by education, the state of our senses, through which sensations come to us, those of our members, of our general health, modifies the direction of our life.

Except in purely reflexive movements, those which we have in common with the most rudimentary organisms – for example the action that consists in quickly moving a hand from an object which burns on contact – thought precedes the act and thought is itself provoked by a sensation or the memory of a sensation. Anyone will easily admit that man is not free to do anything he wishes even in the absence of external constraints. An individual could very much like to be strong, to lift millstones, to be a runner, to dedicate himself to sports, gymnastics, it is not enough to want to be able to, his body must be prepared, he must have strong enough muscles, supple enough limbs, he must not be either asthmatic or obese, he needs a healthy heart, etc. All these things do not depend solely on his will. However, if one goes back into the domain entitled “moral,” one hastens immediately to affirm that the will alone to be sober, chaste, hard-working, etc., is enough to become so. And why the body that disallows agility in one, does not disallow in the other the application to intellectual or physical labor.

If man is not free to act according to his desires, he is also not free to will in one manner rather than another.

What determines will? Sensation or the memory of an old sensation, which is the same thing. Are we free to dictate external circumstances, to choose the objects, the scenes that strike our eyes, the individuals who brush past us, the words that strike our ears? Of course not. Events of the environment which comprise the uncoiling of our existence, are they not, however, the most powerful causes of our acts and consequently of the direction that our will takes and of the acts it determines?

For an act to be free it must be isolated, without a connection to anything at all, that it be an effect without a cause. Now, every act is the consequence of another. One acts in such a way because in doing so one shows the desire, because some external or internal cause determined the desire. This cause is a

thought, an action it accomplished, an act to which it was witness. This thought or this act are in their turn the result of an anterior cause. Sometimes one may go back quite far in following the chain of causes and effects; most often to the contrary the immediate motives alone are not apparent; it seems even, in certain cases, that one can discern none at all; but *nothing is born of nothing*.

The will does not escape this law; as every manifestation, it proceeds anterior manifestations and, consequently, cannot be free since it is a result.

The will and the acts it determines, not being free, are necessarily the expression of the need of the body or the characteristic of the morbid state. In no case may they be attributed to caprice, to free choice, in no case should they involve approbation or repression.

No one is responsible, science says, since no one is free to determine, to his liking, the exterior causes under the empire in which they act; since no one is free to choose the elements entering the composition of his body, elements which produce in him diverse tendencies and needs.

In declaring human will subject to the causes that determined its manifestation, science draws thus on the old maxim: do what you want, you are healthy, your will will only guide you to acts capable of conserving your health and happiness. As for those who, under the influence of unhealthy influences, are taken to harmful acts, they will become rarer as physical and mental hygiene become well observed. In any case, sickness calls for treatment and not punishment. Repressive measures might constitute a vengeance, but are powerless to stop the acts they punish, since they leave the causes that brought them about to remain.

Once, it seemed enough to empirically treat men succumbing to cholera or typhoid fever; today, they seek to prevent epidemics, to destroy the source of the contagion. Humanity, enlightened by science's teachings – conscious that man is no more free to will healthily than to behave well – should also seek to destroy acts harmful to individuals and organize mental hygiene, as it already seeks to organize physical hygiene.

The doctrine of free will is not justified by any religious conception.

Not a single religion recognizes the freedom of man, not a single one can. If an absolute god *governs* the world, does not everything that happens there result from *his* will? What is man in this case, if not an actor playing a role in a play whose outcome is determined by the author, a puppet whose strings are pulled by god? If man could act against the will of god, god would not be *all-powerful*. God, “allows certain acts to be carried out,” say believers to get out of this one. The permission of god being declared necessary for an act to be carried out. This affirmation amounts to, in reality, the negation of man's freedom.

Far from encouraging those who would support these acts, sacred books, supposedly inspired by the god of christianity, contain, just as the Jewish scriptures which they follow, passages affirming the absolute dependence of man. Therein one finds the doctrine of predestination by virtue of which god elects some and reproves others, not at all for their actions, but for his own pleasure.

Why do believers pray, why do they demand grace, if they are free? Do they not confess while they are subject to influences they fear and seek to replace it with a contrary influence: that of grace? Why do they implore their god in order to get a job, for the success of a business etc. Do they not in so doing affirm the absolute authority of their god over men who, by all appearances, confers work or decides the success of a business, but in the eyes of the believer are but instruments of divine will?

Denied by science, incompatible even with religious chimera, the principle of freedom in the choice of actions finds however a great many defenders. On what do they base their opinion?

As for societies, they make this idea into a weapon allowing them to ruthlessly deal with those who break from obedience. "You will submit to my laws, you will conform your activities to them, because you only need to will it to do so. You will be a slave, because you are free to want to;" such is the language that societies, in reality, hold onto men who appear to have caught onto this incoherence.

"You are dependent on a thousand different causes, says science, so go, follow the internal law of your being, that which inspires the very nature of your body; obey only it, be free to act in everything according to your instinct, your desire, the expression of your need."

In continuing this study, one will note again a whole host of points of contradiction existing between the way of life of current societies and the teachings of science. Without entering into more details, one sees that the functioning of societies has authority as its basis; the individual does not act according to his own nature, but is constrained, at all costs, should he even lose his life, to bow before all demands of the rule imposed on him.

Individual freedom would produce, it is believed, a fearsome chaos. So is the universe chaotic?

In the universe action and reaction are incessantly becoming entangled. Long periods of evolution are followed by sudden upheavals. Cataclysm, destroying a species, gives birth to a new one. The universe is neither order nor disorder, it is life.

If the gigantic stars and the multitude of bodies peopling the immensity more thusly with no other law than their own nature, can one not believe that man is capable of himself also living according to the law of his body without this liberty resulting in the extraordinary disasters they predict to us?

Only the ignorant imagine that if such a powerful celestial hand doesn't keep them in their respective places, the sun, the moon, and the stars would fall to the earth like simple hailstones. The composition of celestial bodies, their sheer size, their weight, the attractive influences they exercise and that other bodies exercise on them, all these causes and a good many others still do not allow the stars the liberty to collide in such a way. No one has to keep them in line, their very constitution keeps them right where they are.

There is no other secret in the universe: each individuality behaves according to *what it is* and human individualities can be no exception.

The self-proclaimed wise woman, who claims to direct them in diverting the sort of energy that is fit to their bodies in order to constrain them to another in which they are not apt, produces only confusion and suffering.

Universal life appears to us made up of the incessant movement of molecular individualities aggregating according to their composition and the environments they encounter. Just as the conscious man unites with his peers according to his needs, human associations form, dissolve and reform following the needs that manifest.

If science shows us no trace of government in the universe, why imagine man alone is to be an exception? Is it not wiser, on the contrary, to conclude that, freed from hindrances, he would act like all bodies that exist in nature: according to the law that is his own, not as a commandment emanating from an exterior authority, but as a necessity of his being.

The artificial antagonism existing between the interests of individuals that compose societies manifests in a whole host of ways. Some are indicated above, but upon reflection anyone will easily discover many others. What it is worthwhile for all to understand is that we all live on war footing. Peace is but a word and a profound blindness alone can prevent us from seeing the fights waged among men. We don't see the victims falling in the roar of gunfire, but how numerous are those who succumb in silence, killed by this silent and hypocritical war.

Who is he – even among the most favored by fortune, the most envied – who, upon examining, cannot find an injury he owes to one of these sad struggles of interests? What is the point of forming societies, if it is to tear one another apart? In what way do we distinguish ourselves from groups of primitives? ... Or groups of animals?

The pursuit of happiness of all by the happiness of each, solidarity, are the bases which would indicate a society of conscious men. We are not barbarians.

What purpose should man set for himself? What is the purpose of his life?

What is the purpose of the universe? Up to the present nothing has come along to demonstrate that there is one other than to be what it is. Eternal existence, substance, under the multiple forms they exist, without us having been able to find outside of them their reason or point.

A biblical legend attributes to the god Yaweh, appearing in a burning bush, this response to Moses, who asks his name: "I am that I am." The aryan⁹ philosophy whose conceptions rise so much higher than those of Semitic spirit designate in one word the infinity of things: *Sat* (that) in the Sanskrit. Not *he* but *that* which is and to the impersonal *that*, made up of all the existences emanating from him, it would be difficult to imagine a point: which is to say an end that is final and exterior to himself, since he is "all that has been, is, and will be" that he encompasses all and that consequently nothing exists that is outside of him.

Man's only aim is to achieve the chimeric paradise, in hopes of which he accepts such a long and miserable life, full of renouncement and suffering. Belief in the cruel god, who makes you pay in advance for celestial happiness with pain and tears is, if not dead then much weakened and, with rare exceptions, it is no longer solely this extraterrestrial goal to which humanity offers its efforts.

Man's goal is not to serve abstract ideas: conceptions of his brain that he builds into idols. He does not have to strive to be good, honest to achieve some fantasy of his imagination that he calls virtue, no more than he seek to avoid or to abandon himself to another of these chimera he calls vice.

The work considered by some to be the end of human existence is not an end, but simply a means to perpetuate his life, to adorn it; humanity must necessarily produce to meet its multiple needs. An indispensable sum of work imposes itself on it, but only as a means to better fill out its only purpose: *to live*.

Likewise the individual taken in isolation cannot abstain from the effort made to provide for the preservation of his existence, but his work has no *raison d'être* – for him – unless he gets a personal benefit from it. It matters

9 ADN today would probably write that Indian thought appears more rich to her than judeo christianity. We should note as well that classical hellenism did not find favor with her. (Editor's note from the French Edition) .

little, for a man, to plant, to weave, to build, to dedicate oneself to occupations that appear to be the most useful, to produce anything, if he cannot use the fruits of his labor to eat his fill, to have accommodations, to dress well.

Work cannot be but a means that serves as a means to live while satisfying desires both material and intellectual. Such is the only way that it should be considered and, every individual for whom working doesn't achieve this end is in error.

Man does not have to look for his purpose outside of himself, he should not place it on anything exterior, men or ideas. Nothing obliges him to contradict himself to attain whatever end. He has absolutely no other than to be *himself*, such as nature made him and to survive as such, in preserving his individuality against everything capable of weakening him or causing him suffering...

What would you put, some ask, in place of these laws, these institutions whose utility you deny? Nothing. *Life*. Life which draws beings along in the current of evolutions, which places them and makes them move according to the laws governing the matter of which they are composed. Laws in no way artificial and exterior, but deriving from properties inherent in different states of matter.

To those who fear seeing the contemporary social edifice crumble without thinking of the numerous civilizations, all those societies that have disappeared in the cause of ages – of which memory is barely kept – while humanity still remains alive on the ruins of dwelling places that have ceased to fit well, to those who anxiously ask: “Who will give you shelter? Where will you live?” one must respond by these words from Luther to whom the same question was posed in saying that the support of the German princes might be lacking:

“Where will I go?” he responded, “Under the sky.”

Where will humanity build its dwelling places? Under the Sky! Always under the same sky that exists today. Where will it live? On the ground!

Who will be man's guide? Himself!

It's not a matter of replacing one constraint for another constraint, but to leave each individual to occupy the place in the universe that is due to him, to give free reign to the activity of the elements forming it.

Humanity in general, no more than the individual in particular, has a goal but to be big, glorious, to work, to neither be useless nor to do useless things. The production in the universe, it arose one day and will continue to exist until

the circumstances which permitted its appearance, change, and it disappears in the eternal succession of transformations of matter: from *that* which is.

Individual existence being the only known reason, the only end of man, should he not preserve it, defend it against everything, against every one, without ever suffering anyone forcing him to sacrifice the slightest part of this life, the only thing that truly belongs to him?

Anyone who enchains the life of man, prevents him from living fully in all his faculties, all his needs, violates his existence, for he doesn't end it instantly in death, he diminishes it, deducting every instant during which the individual, ceding to the constraint, has acted or abstained contrary to his own desires; in a word, has caused living his life to become an instrument in the hands of others.

Understanding that his personal existence is – for him – the only *raison d'être*, the unique end, the only goal he has to pursue against whatever obstacle, men or things, trying to attack him, the conscious man defends it by all the means in his power; with the strength of right that nature's example provides him, with the strength of right that he gives the aspirations of his whole being, ceaselessly striving toward life.

In this struggle, more than in any other, every weapon must serve: by strength or cunning, man is in a state of legitimate defense.

*The goal of man is to be a man.
The goal of his life is to live.*

Suggested Reading:

Neither Lord nor Subject: Anarchism and Eastern Thought

(Enemy Combatant Publications)

Infinite Variety: Writings by Individualist Anarchist Women

(Enemy Combatant Publications)

Disruptive Elements: The Extremes of French Anarchism

(Ardent Press)

The Power of Nothingness

by Alexandra David-Néel and Lama Yongden

(Nihil Obstat Publishing)

Magic and Mystery in Tibet

by Alexandra David-Néel

*In the universe action and reaction are incessantly becoming entangled.
Long periods of evolution are followed by sudden upheavals.
Cataclysm, destroying a species, gives birth to a new one.
The universe is neither order nor disorder, it is Life.*

-from the text

Individualist, anarchist, occultist and traveler, Alexandra David-Néel was born in Paris, on October 24th, 1868 and is certainly one of the most singular and iconoclastic figures in anarchist history. Presented here is the first-ever English translation of her masterful treatise on individualist anarchism *Pour La Vie* (For Life).

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